

04/15/2022

To: The Honorable Thomas A. Varlan

Re: Darren Payne

My name is Amy Hall. I am 54 years old and have been married for 29 years. My husband and I have two children of our own, and another that we took in to raise in our home when she was 14 years old. We also have 4 grandchildren who are the lights of our lives! I am an executive director for public housing with 305 apartment units spread over two different counties. I have been in my present position for close to 9 years. I was born and raised in Harriman, TN. That is also where my office is located. Prior to my becoming executive director for public housing, I worked as a property manager for elderly and disabled individuals for 18 years. My parents divorced when I was 4 years old, so I was brought up living with a single mom in the housing project who was one of the very few that even worked on our block. We lived there for 14 years, and I am now the director over that same housing authority I grew up in. I feel as though I am in my position of work because God has given me the opportunity to show others that hard work pays off. I want the children in my authority to know that they do not have to grow up living generation after generation on welfare, food stamps, and public assistance.

I work hard with the local police and 2 different county authorities to make every effort possible to keep trouble out of our properties and ensure that the families and children in our communities have a safe place to live. In my 27 years of being over housing, I have seen more abuse/neglect, domestic violence, and also drug issues that I could possibly count. In doing so, I feel I have been given a great gift in the ability to judge someone's character. My employees sometimes get blown away by my telling them that even though we have to move a person in due to them passing all criteria and screenings required by our policies and procedures, that the person will be problems. We have no other option but to move someone in that passes the criteria, but in most cases I am correct in that the person does end up with multiple lease violations in a short amount of time.

Your Honor, I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to write this letter on behalf of Mr. Darren Payne. I wanted to write this letter for several different reasons. First of all, I am aware that all authority lies with you in determining Darren's future. I understand that he has pled guilty to some serious drug charges in federal court. Secondly, I wanted to somehow help make you aware of what kind of person Darren is outside of the bad decisions he has made. Lastly, I wanted to inform you of the great family and support system Darren has waiting on him here at home, and the loss they will suffer if they don't have the ability to have Darren in their lives.

I first met Darren and his family when I joined Big Emory Baptist Church in 2001, so I have known them for 21 years. I think Darren was 14 or 15 years of age when I met him. His family was very dedicated to our church and worked hard to help in any way possible, and Darren and his brother were always right along side of them as well. Darren loved basketball, and our church always had at least one night during each week that had basketball for whoever wanted to play at our gym. Several chaperones would always be present to make sure that everyone was behaved and also to be there in case of injuries. Darren would show up to play on many of those nights, and even helped chaperone the younger kids when he was older. Darren also played high school basketball. He was very tall and athletic. During this time in his life, he began to have a lot of back pain. The doctors told his mom and dad that some of the issues were due to him growing too quickly, but were unsure if he had damaged it even more during his many falls on the court. The end result was that when he was an older teen, Darren underwent back surgery to install rods in his back which also led to him having to be on pain medications for a long period of time.

After high school, Darren worked most of his career for a 501 (C)(3) non profit agency serving kids and adults with disabilities. He was always very tender hearted and caring for them, which I feel takes a special kind of person to work with individuals with disabilities on a daily basis. I know I am not cut out for that type of work due to my feeling as though I don't know how to help them or communicate well with them. Darren showed those individuals a loving, caring and patient heart on the daily. I believe that because of Darren's kind heart, his christian upbringing, and the desire he has to be present in his families lives, he has what it takes to be rehabilitated from his drug addiction and even be a pillar in our community to help others not choose the road he has traveled with drugs. After all, it takes someone who has been down that bad road to understand the dangers and save others from falling into that same rut. I have witnessed in my many years of work that those individuals who travel the road of addiction with no remorse, no regrets, and no DESIRE to want anything different out of life will normally fail at ever having the success of living a drug-free productive life. However, I have also seen that those who were not brought up around drugs and who have a good family support system, a firm foundation in Jesus Christ, and have had parents that have instilled in them to respect other people and obey the law, have a much greater success in overcoming addiction. Many are in the world today as counselors and working to help others rehabilitate.

I feel this is the example Darren would be. He has the heart for people, the great support system of his family and church family, as well as the desire to be a father to his two children. I pray that he will be given the chance to be there for his kids. I know his daughter is going to need her daddy to be there as she is growing up, and to walk her down the aisle one day when she gets married, and for the birth of her children. His son needs the relationship with his dad, and for him to be that positive guide in his life that I know Darren can be. There are so many good, honest people in our community that love Darren and want to see him be given another chance at life. We have all seen him interact with his children over the years when they were younger. He was so active in their lives before he started slipping into his addiction. He was even an assistant basketball coach at our local high school and had such respect from his fellow coaches the players. The students all looked up to him and respected him as their coach. Darren had the basketball knowledge that they all desired. Everyone was so disappointed to see Darren fall into the addiction. You could see him struggling in his marriage and family life, in his dedication to church, and his ability to even work. He went from standing on his own two feet as a husband, father, and provider to being divorced, unable to see his children, jobless, and over taken by the drugs.

Your Honor, I know that prison is meant for some people for certain. There are those people that are so corrupt in this world that I personally want to thank you, and others, who lead our justice system and for keeping them incarcerated and making our communities and homes a safer place to raise our kids and grandchildren. In my years and experience with public housing, I have seen so much of this drug pandemic. Because of that experience, I see those that WANT to live that way, and who have no cares for anyone but themselves and their drugs. They don't struggle with doing better because they have no desire to do anything else in life. They act as though they feel they are living their best lives, and they will run over anyone who tries to get in the way of them doing that. They NEED to stay locked up in my opinion.

That is not the kind of person Darren is. He actually WANTS to live a drug-free life. He DESIRES to be a father to his children. He wants to walk his daughter down the aisle one day, and be there to be a positive guide for his son. He wants to be his best friend just as his dad has been to him. I truly believe, that if you allow Darren another chance at life, that his family and community will see him excel in every aspect of life. He needed to be taken off the streets for what he was doing for a time. He needed to know the seriousness and destruction it was causing to himself and others. Believe me in saying that I would not want the responsibility you have on your hands of deciding people's fate. However, I do want to let you know prior to your making this decision about Darren, Your Honor, that Darren is a great person who believes

in and loves Jesus Christ as his savior, who never wanted nor desired to be an addict or hurt anyone (especially his children or family) in any way. I feel I know him well enough to know that he has the desire and ability to help others. I would love to see Darren be given the opportunity to go to high schools and tell others his story of how injuries can lead to not only an injury to the body, but also the destruction of many lives. I believe that he would be an awesome counselor to kids and young adults, and save many from traveling this path he has been on. I have every bit of confidence that he can do so much good and make up for some of the wrong he has done.

As a Christian, I believe with my whole heart that when we die and leave this world we will either go to heaven or hell. It's FINAL. There is not going to be an opportunity for someone who has gone to hell before us to come back to this earth and warn us of how bad or how hot it will be. However, if given the chance to do so, Darren could be given the opportunity to go back out into the community and help save so many from going down the destructive path that drugs will lead them to. I am pleading with you with much respect, Your Honor...Please don't let prison be Darren's final destination in this life, and rob this world of the good he can do.

May God bless you, and thank you once more for allowing me the opportunity to help you get to know Darren more for the person he is, and not just solely by some of the bad decisions he has made.

Sincerely,

*Amy B. Hall*

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